

Malta Declaration by the members of the European Council on the external aspects of migration: addressing the Central Mediterranean route

1. We welcome and support the Maltese Presidency's efforts to take forward all elements of the EU's comprehensive migration policy. We reaffirm our determination to act in full respect of human rights, international law and European values, and in conjunction with UNHCR and IOM.
2. A key element of a sustainable migration policy is to ensure effective control of our external border and stem illegal flows into the EU. In 2016, arrivals decreased to one-third of the levels in 2015. On the Eastern Mediterranean route, while pressures remain, arrivals in the last four months of 2016 were down 98% year-on-year. We remain committed to the EU-Turkey Statement and the full and non-discriminatory implementation of all its aspects, as well as to continued support for the countries along the Western Balkans route.
3. On the Central Mediterranean route, however, over 181,000 arrivals were detected in 2016, while the number of persons dead or missing at sea has reached a new record every year since 2013. With hundreds having already lost their lives in 2017 and spring approaching, we are determined to take additional action to significantly reduce migratory flows along the Central Mediterranean route and break the business model of smugglers, while remaining vigilant about the Eastern Mediterranean as well as other routes. We will step up our work with Libya as the main country of departure as well as with its North African and sub-Saharan neighbours.
4. The Partnership Framework and the Valletta Action Plan have allowed us to deepen long-term cooperation with a number of partner countries, including on root causes of migration, through a solid partnership based on mutual trust. This work is already yielding results and will be intensified. At the same time, the urgency of the situation requires immediate additional operational measures at the regional level, taking a pragmatic, flexible and tailor-made approach at each and every point involving all actors along the migratory route. In this context, we welcome the joint Commission and High Representative Communication "Migration on the Central Mediterranean Route - Managing flows, saving lives".
5. Efforts to stabilise Libya are now more important than ever, and the EU will do its utmost to contribute to that objective. In Libya, capacity building is key for the authorities to acquire control over the land and sea borders and to combat transit and smuggling activities. The EU remains committed to an inclusive political settlement under the framework of the Libyan Political Agreement and to supporting the Presidency Council and the Government of National Accord backed by the United Nations. Where possible the EU and Member States will also step up cooperation with and assistance to Libyan regional and local communities and with international organisations active in the country.
6. Priority will be given to the following elements:
 - a) training, equipment and support to the Libyan national coast guard and other relevant agencies. Complementary EU training programmes must be rapidly stepped up, both in intensity and numbers, starting with those already undertaken by Operation SOPHIA and building on its experience. Funding and planning for these activities needs to be made sustainable and predictable, including through the Seahorse Mediterranean Network;
 - b) further efforts to disrupt the business model of smugglers through enhanced operational action, within an integrated approach involving Libya and other countries on the route and relevant international partners, engaged Member States, CSDP missions and operations, Europol and the European Border and Coast Guard;
 - c) supporting where possible the development of local communities in Libya, especially in coastal areas and at Libyan land borders on the migratory routes, to improve their socio-economic situation and enhance their resilience as host communities;
 - d) seeking to ensure adequate reception capacities and conditions in Libya for migrants, together with the UNHCR and IOM;
 - e) supporting IOM in significantly stepping up assisted voluntary return activities;
 - f) enhancing information campaigns and outreach addressed at migrants in Libya and countries of origin and transit, in cooperation with local actors and international organisations, particularly to counter the smugglers' business model;

g) helping to reduce the pressure on Libya's land borders, working both with the Libyan authorities and all neighbours of Libya, including by supporting projects enhancing their border management capacity;

h) keeping track of alternative routes and possible diversion of smugglers' activities, through cooperative efforts with Libya's neighbours and the countries under the Partnership Framework, with the support of Member States and all relevant EU agencies and by making available all necessary surveillance instruments;

i) continuing support to efforts and initiatives from individual Member States directly engaged with Libya; in this respect, the EU welcomes and is ready to support Italy in its implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding signed on 2 February 2017 by the Italian Authorities and Chairman of the Presidential Council al-Serraj;

j) deepening dialogue and cooperation on migration with all countries neighbouring Libya, including better operational cooperation with Member States and the European Border and Coast Guard on preventing departures and managing returns.

7. These objectives shall be underpinned by the necessary resources. In line with the Valletta Action Plan, the European Union is strengthening the mainstreaming of migration within its Official Development Assistance for Africa, which amounts to €31 billion during this financial period. Some of the actions referred to above can be funded within projects already under way, notably projects funded by the EU Trust Fund for Africa as appropriate, which mobilises €1,8 billion from the EU budget and €152 million from Member States' contributions. To cover the most urgent funding needs now and throughout 2017, we welcome the Commission's decision to mobilise as a first step an additional €200 million for the North Africa window of the Fund and to give priority to migration-related projects concerning Libya.
8. We will further develop our external migration policy in order to make it resilient for future crises. We will identify potential barriers, for example in relation to conditions to be met for returns, and reinforce EU return capacities, while respecting international law. We welcome the Commission's intention to rapidly present, as a first step, an updated Action Plan on Returns and to provide guidance for more operational returns by the EU and Member States and effective readmission based upon the existing acquis.
9. We agree to act determinedly and speedily to achieve the objectives set out in this Declaration and call upon all actors to work towards this end. We welcome the intention of the Maltese Presidency, in close cooperation with the Commission and the High Representative, to present a concrete plan for implementation to this effect to the Council at the earliest opportunity, to take work forward and to ensure close monitoring of results. The European Council will review progress on the overall approach at its meetings in March and in June on the basis of a report from the Maltese Presidency.

Press office - General Secretariat of the Council of the EU

Rue de la Loi 175 - B-1048 BRUSSELS - Tel.: +32 (0)2 281 6319

press@consilium.europa.eu - www.consilium.europa.eu/press